

# IN TOUCH

## *Nutrition and Night Workers*

High caffeine intake, fast foods, unbalanced meals, and snacking on high-fat foods can be “occupational hazards” for night workers. Here are a few tips:

Eat the largest meal of the day in the late afternoon, not when you go home in the morning.

Avoid vending machines and fast food restaurants.

Take lots of fresh fruit and vegetables to work.

Avoid caffeine after midnight. It stays in your system for up to six hours, disturbing sleep when you go home.

Stay hydrated by drinking water frequently to aid digestion, and do not drink alcoholic beverages when you get off your shift.

## *Using your EAP*

*Question:* The EAP knows about my stress problems. If I sign a release, can the EAP professional tell my supervisor that I need to cut back on certain duties, overtime, or other essential functions of my job that may interfere with my mental health?

*Answer:* EAPs cannot initiate requests to change an employee’s job description or direct the organization to modify the employee’s duties or essential functions. However, EAPs can report written recommendations of physicians and other health care providers to supervisors (or appropriate management) to have changes considered to an employee’s duties or essential functions. A signed release is necessary. The EAP can discuss the management of stress with you and what intervention strategies might be helpful.

*Question:* Is it appropriate for me and members of my work team to intervene with a fellow worker who has personal troubles affecting performance, even if the supervisor hasn’t noticed?

*Answer:* You may become aware of the performance problems and personal troubles of a fellow worker much sooner than a supervisor might. As a result, it is possible to talk with a coworker about the EAP and encourage him or her to get help. The employee could recover from a serious personal problem and avoid possible job loss. Coworker interventions can be effective, but you should meet with the EAP to discuss your concerns and consider whether an intervention is appropriate. The EAP will also help you understand boundaries and the limits of your ability to help, along with how to approach your coworker in a supportive, caring way that will increase the likelihood of success.



*Helping people lead healthier lives*

## Your Personal Action Plan

If you are motivated to pursue a goal, put together a personal action plan. Its purpose: to put the goal into action and make its success more likely. Successful plans are written, and include breaking the goal down into distinct actionable parts. Each part or step must answer how, what, and when action will occur. If any one of these measurements is missing, you will be more vulnerable to procrastination and distraction, the two villains of every worthy pursuit. Here's an example of an action plan to establish a fitness routine.

**Not specific:** I will exercise this week after work.

**Better:** This Friday, at 5:00pm, I will go to the ABC Gym and exercise for 45 minutes.

## Actively Listening

Active listening is a powerful relationship skill for improving mutual understanding. Active listening means avoiding being distracted, half listening, or thinking about something else when another person is speaking to you. There are three keys to demonstrating active listening:

- 1) Decide that you will learn something vitally new from the speaker, no matter what your relationship has been in the past.
- 2) Be prepared to repeat back to the speaker the key points of what was said.
- 3) Show that you understand the feelings or the psychological response of the speaker to help him or her feel truly heard.

Benefits of actively listening include fewer misunderstandings, development of mutual respect, deeper relationships, more openness and trust, less conflict, increased morale, and quicker discovery of solutions to problems.

## Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Do you often have repetitive, persistent, and unwanted thoughts that upset you or make you anxious, and that you can't get out of your mind no matter how hard you try? Do you wash your hands more often and for longer periods of time than other people? Do you often repeat routine behaviors (locking doors, turning off light switches, turning off stove burners) because you're not sure you have done these tasks or done them "just right?" Do you repeatedly count things (ceiling tiles, books, clothes, light poles, cars, and the number of times you do something)? Do you unnecessarily arrange, order, or tidy the contents of your desk, closets, cabinets, refrigerator, or bookshelves to make them perfectly in order? Are you worried about acting on unwanted and senseless urges or impulses, such as physically harming someone you love, or committing some antisocial or illegal act?

These are symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), a biologically-based, but very treatable psychiatric illness. It is characterized by recurrent, unpleasant thoughts (obsessions), or feeling driven to perform certain acts over and over again (compulsions). Although sufferers usually recognize that the obsessions and compulsions are senseless or excessive, the symptoms of OCD are difficult to control.

Contact your EAP to learn more about OCD and additional signs and symptoms. You aren't crazy, and you don't have to live with the frustration of feeling as though you can't control your thoughts and behaviors.

For more information, you can visit [www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org).

---

*Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is characterized by recurrent, unpleasant thoughts, or feeling driven to perform certain acts over and over again.*

# *Constructive Criticism - You Can Take It (and Run)*

How well do you accept constructive criticism from your evaluator (supervisor)? Are you brave enough to ask for it? Here are five reasons to make constructive criticism an important part of good communication with your evaluator.

- 1) **Better Annual Reviews:** To maximize positive outcomes on annual reviews, you need to know what your limitations and shortcomings are. Ask for constructive criticism during the year, and you will know where to put your efforts.
- 2) **Demonstrate Balance:** Asking for constructive criticism demonstrates openness and willingness to face one's limitations and make corrections. This balance is a strength valued by employers.
- 3) **No Hidden Secrets:** You will sleep better knowing what your evaluator thinks about your work. Hearing feedback, particularly if it is negative, can be difficult. Still it is better to get this information early and out in front while you have time to make corrections. You can't do this if you avoid feedback.
- 4) **Improve Your Worth:** It is easy to take constructive criticism personally and feel hurt by it. With experience, however, a receptive attitude emerges. The changes you make improve your worth to the organization.
- 5) **Build Rapport:** Giving constructive criticism is not easy for most evaluators. An employee who is open-minded and receptive to constructive criticism makes it easier for an evaluator. This enables a more trusting and satisfying relationship.

Make it easier for your evaluator to give you the best rating possible by providing a list of your accomplishments, both big and small.

To create the most comprehensive list, jog your memory by examining "in" and "out" correspondence files, work logs, word processing files, and appointment calendars. Keep a copy, and you'll eventually have a record of every important accomplishment of your career.

## *Your Family's Disaster Plan*

Disasters—hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, floods, earthquakes, chemical spills—can strike anywhere. Do you have a family disaster plan? A great resource guide to help you assemble one is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's guide, "Your Family Disaster Plan."

The free guide walks you through four steps:

- 1) Understanding disasters that can affect your area.
- 2) Creating a family plan so you work as a team.
- 3) Completing a checklist.
- 4) Practicing and maintaining the plan.

To learn more, contact FEMA, [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov), or at 1-800-480-2520.

## *When Calm Makes You Crazy*

Are you so busy in your job that you get stressed or anxious when blocks of time show up unfilled on your appointment calendar? Many people feel compelled to fill these free hours with more appointments and busy work to rid themselves of the anxiety. Don't fall into this trap. If your job permits, use slow times to do the things you have been putting off, such as organizing your desk or work area, planning for the future, learning new skills, or preparing for upcoming projects.

## *When Employees Face Grief*

Confusion over how to respond to the death of a co-worker often follows the denial, shock, anxiety, and overwhelming sadness of the event. Ask the EAP about resources or support it can offer to you or your work group. Here are a few tips from the National Hospice Organization based upon the experience of workplaces that have faced the death of a coworker.

- 1) Accept the extent, depth, and duration, and how the grief process unfolds for different coworkers. Avoid judgmental thinking. No two coworkers will grieve the same way.
- 2) One or two employees serving as contacts between the work group and the family of the deceased employee reportedly works well.
- 3) Share information so everyone knows what plans and events are unfolding to memorialize the deceased or support the family.
- 4) If the supervisor is not part of a coordinating group, be sure to keep him or her informed as plans evolve.

## *Share the Stress*

There is an old saying, "A problem shared is a problem halved." When you are under stress, are you able to call upon someone in your life who is willing to listen to what you have to say—someone who is non-judgemental? If so, you are practicing one of the most powerful tools for managing stress and maintaining health. Sharing stress is not about whining, "putting things off on others," or demonstrating weakness. It is about personal strength, valuing vulnerability, participating in meaningful relationships, finding solutions, and maintaining health. If you struggle with practicing this life skill, it can be learned. Your EAP can help.

To speak with an EAP professional,  
please call:

**800.765.0770**